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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the social context of curriculum construction and development to show the relationship between school curricula and patterns of social organization control. The first section traces the history of the concept of curriculum based on sequence, prescription, and differentiation and links this concept to the prevailing ideology of Calvinism and the social requirements of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism. By the 20th century, the batch production rhetoric of the "classroom system" (lessons, subjects, timetables, grading, standardization, and streaming) had become so pervasive that it successfully achieved a normative status, creating standards against which all subsequent educational innovations came to be judged. This dominant epistemology was based on the trilogy of pedagogy, curriculum, and evaluation, creating a hierarchy of status and resources for academic subjects, academic examinations, and able students, with university knowledge and university scholars at the apex. The second section is a critique of this dominant epistemology and institutionalized system of state schooling, comparing it with antecedents and suggesting egalitarian alternatives based on the centrality of dialogue and flexibility in the learning process. (TE)

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CURRICULUM AS STRUCTURED INEQUALITY

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CURRICULUM AS STRUCTURED INEQUALITY

In this paper I don't deal at all, at least not directly, with the issue of 'efficiency and inequality' except that I have always viewed schooling as enormously efficient at distributing, underpinning and legitimising inequality. In a way, this paper seeks some answers as to how this is achieved.

At root it moves from a belief that part of the scholarly task of uncovering the relationship between schooling and inequality is buried in the very fabric of the assumptions surrounding the concept curriculum. By this view the basic conception of curriculum is deeply structured and deeply implicated in the distribution of inequality. If this is so, we need to reconceptualise our study of schooling.

The problem of reconceptualising our study of schooling can be partially illustrated in the basic etymology of curriculum. The word curriculum derives from the Latin word currere, which means to run, and refers to a course (or race-chariot). The implications of etymology are that curriculum is thereby defined as a course to be followed, or most significantly, presented. As Barrow notes 'as far as etymology goes, therefore the curriculum should be understood to be 'the presented content' for study'.[1] Social context and construction by this view is relatively unproblematic for by etymological implication the power of 'reality-definition' is placed firmly in the hands of those who 'draw up' and define the course. The bond between curriculum and prescription then was forged early; it has survived and strengthened over time.

Part of the strengthening of this bond has been the emergence of sequential patterns of learning to define and operationalise the curriculum

as prescribed. From its Latin origins it is important to trace the emergence of curriculum as a concept which began to be used in schooling. It has been argued that 'the words class and curriculum seem to have entered educational discourse at a time when schooling was being transformed into a mass activity'.[2] Hamilton provides further evidence from Glasgow where the Oxford English Dictionary locates the earliest source of 'curriculum' in 1633. The annexation of the Latin term for a race-course is clearly related to the emergence of sequencing in schooling' but the question 'Why Glasgow?' remains. He believes, that 'the sense of discipline or structural order that was absorbed into curriculum came not so much from classical sources as from the ideas of John Calvin (1509-1564)'.

> As Calvin's followers gained political as well as theological ascendancy in late sixteenth century Switzerland, Scotland and Holland, the idea of discipline - 'the very essense of Calvinism'- began to denote the internal principles and external machinery of civil government and personal conduct. From this perspective there is a homologous relationship between curriculum and discipline: curriculum was to Calvinist educational practice as discipline was to Calvinist social practice.[3]

We have then an early instance, if these speculations carry weight, of the relationship between knowledge and control. This works at two levels with regard to curriculum definition. Firstly there is the social context in which knowledge is conceived of and produced. Secondly there is the manner in which such knowledge is 'translated' for use in particular educational milieu, in this case classes but later classrooms. The social context of curriculum construction must take account of both levels.

The evidence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be summarised as follows and makes a fairly clear statement of the interlinked nature of the emerging mode of curriculum and patterns of social organization and control:

> the notion of classes came into prominence with the rise of sequential programmes of study which, in turn, resonated with various Renaissance and Reformation sentiments of upward mobility. In Calvinist countries (such as Scotland) these views found their expression theologically in the doctrine of predestination (the belief that only a preordained minority could attain spiritual salvation) and, educationally, in the emergence of national but bipartite education systems where the 'elect' (i.e. predominantly those with the ability to pay) were offered the prospect of advanced schooling, while the remainder (predominantly the rural poor) were fitted to a more conservative curriculum (the appreciation of religious knowledge and secular virtue).[4]

This quote sets up the unique significance of curriculum as it developed. For soon after as its power to designate what should go on in the classroom was realized, a further power was discovered. Alongside the power to designate was the power to differentiate. This meant that even children who went to the same school could be given access to what amounted to different 'worlds' through the curriculum they were taught.

The general connection between 'class' pedagogies and a curriculum based on sequence and prescription is clear but to move towards the 'modern' duality of pedagogy and curriculum involves the transition from class to classroom system.

In analysing the historical transition from 'class' to classroom system the shift in the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th Century 'was as important to the administration of schooling as the concurrent shift from domestic to factory production was to the management of industry'. Indeed, as Smelser has shown the two were intimately related;

> 'in the pre-industrial family of a craftsman, the parents themselves are responsible for teaching the child minimum occupational skills, as well as for his emotional molding during his early years. When a growing economy places demands for greater literacy and more technical skills, the pressure is for this multi-functional family to give way to a new, more complex set of social arrangements. Structurally distinct educational institutions

> appear and the family begins to surrender some of its previous training functions to these new institutions, having lost these functions, accordingly, the family becomes more specialised, focusing relatively more on emotional conditioning in the early childhood years and relatively less on its former economic and educational functions.'(5)

In the 'domestic-putter out' system then the family unit remained at home and education, albeit rather more in the guise of training and apprenticeship, could therefore take place in the home. With the triumph of the factory system the associated break-up of the family opened up these roles to subsequent penetration by State schooling and to their replacement by the classroom system where large groups could be adequately supervised and controlled. Hence 'the change from class to classroom reflected a more general upheaval in schooling - the ultimate victory of group-based pedagogies over the more individualised forms of teaching and learning'.(6)

At this stage in the development of schooling the intersection of pedagogy and curriculum begins to resemble more 'modern' patterns. As Bernstein has argued pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation considered together constitute the three message systems through which formal educational knowledge can be realised, in this sense they constitute a modern epistemology.(7) In the 1850s the third prong was pioneered with the founding of the first university examination boards. The centennial report of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate reports:

> The establishment of these examinations was the universities response to petitions that they should help in the development of 'schools for the middle classes'.(8)

Also at this time the features of curriculum mentioned earlier, the power to differentiate, was being institutionalised. The birth of secondary <u>examinations</u> and the institutionalisation of curriculum <u>differentiation</u> were then almost exactly contemporaneous. For instance the Taunton Report in 1868

classified secondary schooling into three grades depending on the time spent at school. Taunton asserted:

> 'The difference in time assigned makes some difference in the very nature of education itself; if a boy cannot remain at school beyond the age of 14 it is useless to begin teaching him such subjects as required a longer time for their proper study; if he can continue till 18 or 19, it may be expedient to postpone some studies that would otherwise be commenced earlier.'

Taunton noted that 'these instructions correspond roughly but by no means exactly to the gradations of society'. (This statement could as we shall see, be equally well applied to the Norwood Report nearly a century later.) In 1868 schooling till 18 or 19 was for the sons of men with considerable incomes independent of their own exertions, or professional men, and men in business whose profits put them on the same level. These received a mainly classical curriculum. The second grade up to 16 was for sons of the 'mercantile classes'. Their curriculum was less classical in orientation and had a certain practical orientation. The third grade till 14 was for the sons of 'the smaller tenant farmer, the small trades-men, (and) the superior artisans'. Their curriculum was based on the three Rs but carried out to a very good level. These gradations cover secondary schooling. Meanwhile most of the working class remained in elementary schools where they were taught rudimentary skills in the three Rs. By this time the curriculum functioned as a major identifier of and mechanism for social differentiation. This power to designate and differentiate established a conclusive place for curriculum in the epistemology of schooling.

By the turn of the century the epistemology, with which we are familiar, was emerging. Thus:

> By the 20th Century, the batch production rhetoric of the 'classroom system' (for example, lessons, subjects, timetables, grading, standardisation, streaming) had become so pervasive that

> it successfully achieved a normative status - creating the standards against which all subsequent educational innovations came to be judged.(9)

The dominant epistemology which characterised state schooling by the beginning of the twentieth century combined the trilogy of pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation. The last of the pieces in the trilogy was the establishment of university examination boards and here the side-effects on curriculum were to be both pervasive and longlasting. The classroom system inaugurated a world of timetables and compartmentalised lessons; the curriculum manifestation of this systemic change was the school subject. If 'class and curriculum' entered educational discourse when schooling was transformed into a mass activity 'classroom system and school subject' emerged at the stage at which that mass activity became a state-subsidised system. And in spite of the many alternative ways of conceptualising and organising curriculum the convention of the subject retains its supremacy. In the modern era we are essentially dealing with the curriculum as subject.

Whilst this system was inaugurated in the 1850s it was established on the present footing with the definition of the Secondary Regulations in 1904 which list the main subjects followed by the establishment of a subject-based 'School Certificate' in 1917. From this date curriculum conflict began to resemble the existing situation in focusing on the definition and evaluation of examinable knowledge. Hence the School Certificate subjects rapidly became the overriding concern of grammar schools and the academic subjects it examined soon established ascendancy on these schools' timetables. In 1941 Norwood reported that:

> a certain sameness in the curriculum of schools resulted from the double necessity of finding a place for the many subjects competing for time in the curriculum and the need to teach these subjects in such a way and to such a standard as will ensure

success in the School Certificate examination.

The normative character of the system is clear and as a result of 'these necessities' the curriculum had 'settled down into an uneasy equilibrium, the demands of specialists and subjects being widely adjusted and compensated'[10]. The extent to which university examination boards thereby influenced the curriculum through examination subjects is evident. The academic subject- centred curriculum was in fact strengthened in the period following the 1944 Education Act. In 1951 the introduction of the General Certificate of Education allowed subjects to be taken separately at 'O' level (in the School Certificate blocks of 'main' subjects had to be passed); and the introduction of Advanced level increased subject specialisation and enhanced the link between 'academic' examinations and university 'disciplines'. The academic subjects which dominated 'O' and especially 'A' level examinations were then closely linked to university definitions; but even more crucially they were linked to patterns of resource allocation. Academic 'subjects' claiming close connections to university 'disciplines' were for the 'able' students. From the beginning it was assumed that such students required 'more staff, more highly paid staff and more money for equipment and books'[11]. The crucial and sustained line between 'academic' subjects and preferential resources and status was therefore established.

But if this system was predominant with regard to staffing and resources for academic subjects in grammar schools, the implications for the other schools (and styles of curriculum) should not be forgotten.

Echoing Taunton, Norwood in 1943 had discovered that schooling had created distinctive groups of pupils each of which needed to be treated 'in a way appropriate to itself'. This time the social and class basis of

differentiation remained the same but the rationale and mechanism for differentiation was significantly different. Before the argument had focussed on time spent at school now the emphasis was on different 'mentalities' each recognising a different curriculum. Firstly 'the pupil who is interested in learning for its own sake, who can grasp an argument or follow a piece of connected reasoning'. Such pupils 'educated by the curriculum commonly associated with grammar schools have entered the learned professions or have taken up higher administrative or business posts'. The second group whose interests lie in the field of applied science or applied arts were to go to technical schools (which never developed very far). Thirdly the pupils who deal 'more easily with concrete things than with ideas'. The curriculum would 'make a direct appeal to interests, which it would awaken by practical touch with affairs'. A practical curriculum then for a manual occupational future.

We see then the emergence of a definite pattern of prioritising of pupils through curriculum; what emerges I have called elsewhere 'the triple alliance between academic subjects, academic examinations and able pupils'. Working through patterns of resource allocation this means a process of pervasive 'academic drift' afflicts sub-groups promoting school subjects. Hence subjects as diverse as woodwork and metalwork, physical education, art technical studies, book-keeping, needlework and domestic science have pursued status improvement by arguing for enhanced academic examinations and qualifications. Likewise schools defined as different from grammar schools, the technical schools and secondary modern schools also were ultimately drawn into the process of academic drift both ending up competing for success through academic subject based styles of examination. All groups therefore

became coopted into a meritocratic version of schooling with university knowledge and university scholars at the top of the apex.

In a way the evolution of each subject reflects in microcosm a struggle over alternatives over time which is not dissimilar to the overall pattern discerned as State schooling is established and defined. Hence Layton sees the initial stage as one where 'the learners are attracted to the subject because of its bearing on matters of concern to them. At this point the teachers are seldom trained as subject specialists but do 'bring the missionary enthusiasms of pioneers to their task'. Significantly at this stage 'the dominant criterion is relevance to the needs and interests of the learners'. However as the subject 'progresses' (a subject at any point in time resembling a coalition which veneers a sub-set of warring factions) the role of the universities becomes more and more important. This is not least because subject groups employ a <u>discourse</u> where they argue increasingly for their subject to be viewed as an 'academic discipline' (thereby claiming the financial resources and career opportunities which accrue). The corollary of this claim is the university scholars must be given control over defining the 'discipline' (the aspiration to the rhetoric of 'the discipline' is related to acceptance of this hierarchical pattern of definition so in this sense the discursive formation is critical). Jenkins has noted that:

> 'one detects a certain embarrassment in teachers who not unnaturally feel the difference between forms, disciplines and subjects are in part differences of status'.[12]

In effect the differences are over <u>who</u> can define 'disciplines'- essentially this is presented as the characteristic activity of university scholars.

The progressive refinement of an epistemology suited to State schooling

then embraces the trilogy of pedagogy, curriculum and examination. Until recently the 'triple alliance' of academic subjects, academic examinations and able students have been able to enjoy a clear hierarchy of status and resources. Thus our understanding of curriculum has to focus mainly on analysing the dominant convention of the school subject and the associated examination by university boards. The linking of resources to 'academic' subjects places a priority on subjects that can be presented as 'academic disciplines' and this places further power in the hands of the universities. Not that the power of the universities over curriculum is unchallenged, the challenges are recurrent. Reid has noted that a major area of conflict is between the external constraints arising from university requirements and the internal pressures which have their origins in the school:

> Schools are, however, poorly equipped to resist university pressures. To a large extent they allow the legitimacy of the university demands, and have evolved an authority structure which is linked to them.[13]

Such recurrent conflict is of course likely as the school subjects 'progresses' away from Layton's early stage where 'the dominant criterion is relevance to the needs and interests of the learners'. But as we have seen an epistemology has been institutionalised and resourced which places the academic 'discipline' at the top of the curriculum apex. Not surprising the culminating stage in the establishment of an 'academic' subject celebrates the power of scholars to define the disciplines' field. In this culminating stage however Layton argues that related to this change in who defines school knowledge 'Students are initiated into a tradition, their attitudes approaching passivity and resignation, a prelude to disenchantment.'[14]

Antecedents and Alternatives

The epistemology and institutionalised system of State schooling briefly described above was in sharp contrast to antecedent forms of education and to the involvement of the State in schooling at this earlier stage. Rothblatt for instance describes education in Georgian England as follows:

> The State was not interested in 'national education' - indeed the idea had not yet occurred. The Church, which was interested in education, because of its continuing rivalry with Dissent, still did not have a firm policy and left the direction of studies to local or personal initiatives, or to the forces of the market. The demand for education and the demand for particular levels of education varied radically from period to period and from group to group, depending upon social and economic circumstances, occupational distributions, and cultural values. Countless persons, lay as well as clerical, opened schools, tried out various educational experiments and programmes in an effort to retain a fickle or uncertain clientele. And home tuition, where adjustments in curricula could be made quickly and easily according to the learning ability of the pupil, certainly remained one of the most important means of elementary and secondary education throughout the nineteenth century.[15]

Such a personal and local mode of educating could well have allowed response to the experience and culture of the pupils even in situations less ideal than home tuition 'where adjustments could be made quickly and easily according to the learning ability of pupil'. But among working class groups certainly in the sphere of adult education such respect for life experience in curriculum was a feature at this time and later. This contribution can be summarised as: 'the students' choice of subject. The relation of disciplines to actual contemporary living and the parity of general discussion with expert instruction'[16]. Above all there is the idea of curriculum as a two-way conversation rather than a one-way transmission.

Likewise different patterns of education and attendance characterised the working class private school, which thrived in the first half of the nineteenth century and continued into the second half in many places even

after the 1870 act. Harrison has described these schools and the views which State inspectors held of them:

> Government inspection and middle class reformers condemned such schools as mere baby-minding establishments. They noted with strong disapproval the absence of settled or regular attendance. The pupils came and went at all times during the day. School hours were nominal and adjusted to family needs - hence the number of two- and three- year olds who were sent to be 'out of the way' or 'kept safe'. The accommodation was over-crowded and sometimes stuffy, dirty and unsanitary. The pupils were not divided into classes, and the teacher was a working man or woman...

As well as not being arranged in classes, the curriculum was often individualised rather than sequential. Harrison describes 'Old Betty W's School' where; On fine days the little forms were taken outside her cottage and placed under the window. The children had their books, or their knitting and the old lady, knitting herself incessantly, marched backwards and forwards hearing lessons and watching work.'[17]

These working class schools were effectively driven out by the version of State schooling which followed the 1870 Act. Thompson has argued that the watershed for such schools, certainly such styles of working class education, were the fears engendered by the French Revolution. From now on the State played an increasing role in the organisation of schooling and of curriculum:

> attitudes towards social class, popular culture and education became 'set' in the aftermath of the French Revolution. For a century and more most middle class educationalists could not distinguish the work of education from that of social control: and this entailed too often, a repression or a denial of the life experience of their pupils as expressed in uncouth dialect or in traditional cultural forms. Hence education and received experience were at odds with each other. And those working men who by their own efforts broke into the educated culture found themselves at once in the same place of tension, in which education brought with it the danger of rejection of their fellows and self-distrust. The tension of course continues.[18]

The disjuncture then between common cultural experience and curriculum can be

estimated, for working class clienteles, as developing after the moral panics associated with the French Revolution. From this date on the school curriculum was often overlaid by social control concerns for the ordinary working populace.

For other classes at the time this overlay of closely structured, sequenced and presented curriculum was not always deemed necessary. We learn that the public schools 'followed no common pattern of education, though they agreed on the taking of Latin and Greek as the main component of the curriculum. Each evolved its own unique forms of organisation with idiosyncratic vocabularies to describe them.'[19]. In so far as the curriculum depended on a learning of texts it was not judged essential that the teacher taught the text - a highly individualised form of curriculum. Moreover 'where students were divided into 'forms' (a term referring originally to the benches on which they sat) this was done in a rough and ready manner for the convenience of teaching and not with the idea of establishing a hierarchy of ability or a sequence of learning'[20].

Hence coherent alternative forms of education and curriculum developed in a wide range of schools for all classes prior to the Industrial Revolution and even after industrial transformation were retained in the public schools for the 'better classes' (and indeed for the working class were retained and defended in pockets such as 'adult education'). The model of curriculum and epistemology associated with State schooling progressively colonised all educational milieu and established itself some time in the late 19th century as the dominant pattern. The subsequent linking of this epistemology to the distribution of resources and the associated attribution of status and careers stands at the centre of the consolidation of this pattern. The

assumption that the curriculum should be primarily academic and associated with university disciplines has been painstakingly worked for and paid for. We should beware of any accounts which present such a situation of 'normal' or 'given'.

At root such a hierarchical system is often seen as denying the dialectic of education, the notion of dialogue and flexibility which some viewed (and view) as central to the way we learn. If 'subject matter is in large measure defined by the judgements and practice of the specialist scholars' and 'students are initiated into a tradition' their attitudes approach passivity and 'resignation' this mutuality is deliberately denied. The rhetoric of the 'discipline' and the academic subject might therefore be seen as characterising a particular mode of social relations.

Educationists concerned with establishing a more egalitarian practice and curriculum are driven to constantly assert the need for dialogue and mutuality and with it to argue for 'reconstruction of knowledge and curriculum'. For if the opinions cited are right the very fabric and form of curriculum (as well as the content) assumes and establishes a particular mode of social relations and social hierarchy. Seen in this way to argue only for changing the teaching method or the school organisation is to accept a central mystification of hierarchical structure through curriculum which would actively contradict other aspirations and ideals. Hence where pockets of alternative practice exist they present a similar case for egalitarian practice: in liberal adult education the following argument is presented:

> All education which is worth the name involves a relationship of mutuality, a dialectic: and no worthwhile educationalist conceives of his material as a class of inert recipients of instruction - and no class is likely to stay the course with him - if he is under the misapprehension that the role of the class is passive. What is different about the adult student is the experience which he brings

> to the relationship. This experience modifies, sometimes subtly, and sometimes more radically, the entire educational process: it influences teaching methods, the selection and maturation of tutors, the syllabus: it may even disclose weak places or vacancies in received academic disciplines and lead on to the elaboration of new areas of study.(21)

By this view then the disciplines cannot be taught as final 'distillations' of knowledge unchallengeable and unchanging and should not be taught as incontestable and fundamental structures and texts. This would provide a deeply-flawed epistemology, pedagogically unsound and intellectually dubious, for in human scholarship 'final distillations' and 'fundamental' truths are elusive concepts. We are back with the dual face of socially contexted knowledge - both because knowledge and curriculum are pedagogically realised in a social context and are originally conceived of and constructed in such a context.

The alternatives to such a dominant view continue to surface. In recent debates we can find certain radical teachers pursuing the comprehensive ideal seriously and arguing that in such a milieu knowledge and curricula must be presented as provisional and liable to reconstruction. Armstrong writes that his 'contention is that the process of education should imply a dynamic relationship between teacher, pupil and task out of which knowledge is reconstructed, for both teacher and pupil, in the light of shared experience'.(22)

Conclusion

In this chapter some of the origins of curriculum have been speculatively scrutinised. In particular we have seen that the notion of curriculum as structured sequence or 'discipline' derived a good deal from the political ascendancy of Calvinism. From these early origins there was a

'homologous relationship between curriculum and discipline'. Curriculum as discipline was allied to a social order where the 'elect' were offered the prospect of advanced schooling and the remainder a more conservative curriculum.

Out of these origins we have seen how this concept of curriculum became appended to a new notion of discipline. This time (so we are to believe) 'fundamental' disciplines of 'the mind'. The juxtaposition of curriculum with (newly-defined) 'discipline' intersects with a remarkably similar social configuration. This time the 'elect' are recruited by their capacity to display a facility for those academic 'subjects' allied to the 'disciplines'; their 'election' is signified by going on to study the 'disciplines' in the universities where they are defined and institutionalised.

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